



Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve



NEWSLETTER—WINTER 2012

East Lyme High School Conservation Club Makes Annual Trek through the Hills

On December 3, thirty members of the ELHS Conservation Club made their annual pilgrimage to the Oswegatchie Hills. Accompanied by teacher Laura Ashburn and several parents, the students were given mini-lessons in history, nature and geology of the Hills by FOHNP Board member and past president, Mike Dunn.



The Club mugs for the camera before the trek

They walked a couple of miles—up the new red trail, across the stone bridge over the stream and back on the blue trail—with a little side trip to the stream above Clark Pond, where an active beaver dam has raised the water level about 1-1/2 feet.

Ms. Ashburn takes the Club to the Preserve each year. “It’s a great chance to get the students outside and connected to the environment we talk about in class,” said Ashburn. “It’s a way for the classwork to come to life, and a chance for them

to see that much of what they take for granted, such as the available trails, is the result of hard working volunteers, like the Friends. It gives them a chance to see stewardship in action.”



Club members ford the stream that leads into Clark Pond

Dunn said "It was a great day with a really nice group of kids. They seemed to enjoy learning about the ice harvesting history of Clark Pond and the great minty smell of a black birch twig."



Guided tours are available by visiting the FOHNP website at: www.oswhills.org.

Local Mountain Bikers Help FOHNP Clear Trails Following Tropical Storm



Tropical Storm Irene left its mark on the Preserve, bringing down trees and blocking trails in 34 different areas. Most downed trees were in the southern section of the hills, where the wind came right off Long Island Sound. The interior and northern sections saw fewer downed trees.

All trails were cleared of debris by the FOHNP Stewardship Committee and several volunteers by early November. FOHNP vice president Greg Decker emphasized that the cut wood was not removed from the Preserve. “The Management Council adopted a policy not to remove any cut wood, as decaying wood and tree snags provide habitat for flora and fauna and play an important role in forest ecology,” said Decker.

Special thanks to three mountain bikers from Millstone who ride regularly and who cleared many of the big trees: Mike Roche, Dave Yapchanyk and Jeff Taylor.



These trees temporarily made the Red Trail impassable.

“We’re always happy to help out, as the Preserve is such a great place to ride,” said Mike, a chemist at Millstone. “And we look forward to cooperating with the Friends when they need help.”

New Interactive Kiosk Greets Visitors at Preserve Entrance

An interactive kiosk, built and donated by Dave Hughes of Wild Birds Unlimited of Niantic (Shown below), is now a part of the display at the Veterans Memorial Park entrance to the Preserve.

The kiosk consists of two halves: one containing announcements and information about the Preserve, and the other to give visitors the opportunity to provide suggestions, feedback and information back to the Preserve’s Management Council.



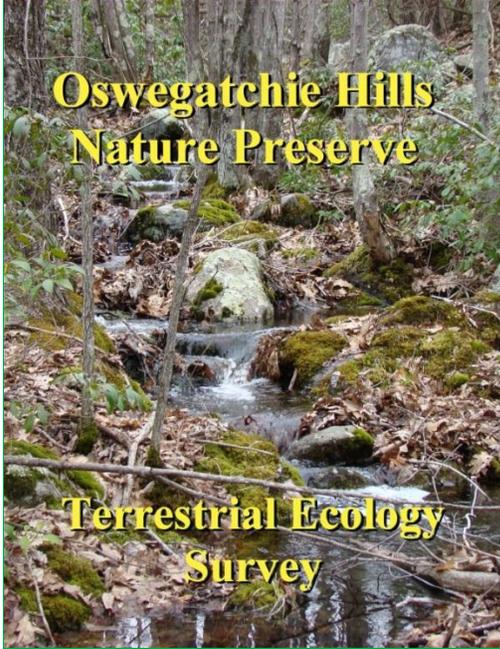
The interactive portion contains:

- A Volunteer sign-up sheet to work on Preserve projects, such as trail improvement;
- A “Recent Sightings” list, where visitors can detail interesting sightings they’ve made while in The Hills;
- A Comment/Suggestion Sheet;
- A “Wildlife of the Month” feature, focusing on a particular plant or animal of interest in The Hills.

The other portion of the kiosk contains informational materials, such as:

- Announcements of recent and upcoming events associated with The Preserve;
- “Bird of the Month,” featuring a native bird;
- “Nature Happenings,” discussing upcoming natural events of interest.

Terrestrial Ecology Survey of the Nature Preserve Completed



A year-round ecological survey of the Nature Preserve was recently completed by FOHNP Board member, Rich Gallagher. The purpose of the survey was to:

- Inventory general habitat types on the Preserve;
- Determine the general plant and animal communities/species present;
- To the extent possible, determine the presence or absence of listed species;
- Locate likely wetlands.

An Executive Summary provides an overall synopsis of the survey, including: general observations of biological and geological assets in the Preserve; information on Clark Pond; flora and fauna; federally and state listed species; forest composition and wetlands.

More detailed information is provided on mammals, birds, and other vertebrates; 25 wetlands identified in the Preserve; and information on plant/animal communities within specific areas of the Preserve.

The Survey was distributed to Town officials and local State Representatives. It is available at the East Lyme Public Library and on the FOHNP website at:

<http://www.oswhills.org/OHNPTerrestrialEcologySurvey.pdf>

Biologist Becomes Newest Member of Management Council

Susan Gonzalez became the newest member of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve Management Council on December 1. Susan is a biologist at the Environmental Lab at Millstone Station, and will be applying her biological expertise in her work with the Management Council, which is charged with stewardship of the Preserve. Susan brings not only her expertise, but a lot of enthusiasm for the Hills.



“The Management Council is a great group of people and what better property to be involved with than the Hills?” said Susan. In the fall of 2010, Susan began helping the Preserve by covering over—camouflaging—the original blazes on the trees along the Orange and Blue trails. These old painted blazes have been replaced by attractive, and more permanent, diamond-shaped plastic blazes.

“This project has given me the perfect reason to take some nice walks in the Hills during what has been some spectacular fall weather,” said Susan.

Welcome aboard, Susan!

Did You Know?

Two Wood Duck nesting boxes in Clark Pond, supplied by Wild Birds Unlimited, have produced approximately 30 fledgling Wood Ducks beginning in 2008.

Dominion Foundation Makes Generous Donation to FOHNP

The Dominion Foundation has presented FOHNP with a check for \$2500, to be used to help the Friends continue the education programs, community outreach, removal of invasive species and improvement to the trails.

“The Niantic River and the land surrounding it are very important to our local ecosystem,” said Nancy Bulkeley of the Foundation. “Dominion is pleased to partner with your Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills to help preserve this important natural resource.”

Thanks to the Dominion Foundation.

Trail Improvement Projects

The FOHNP Stewardship Committee is in the process of identifying sections of trails that are in need of repairs or improvements. Some trail sections in low lying areas become muddy during the rainy season and water from heavy rain events is sometimes channeled down portions of sloping trails, causing erosion.

As the preserve becomes more popular, increased usage will contribute to trail wear. Improvements to some trail sections may require the placement of stepping stones, wooden planks (bog walks) or foot bridges. Volunteers will be needed for most of this and other conservation projects planned for the preserve.

We are also ensuring that invasive plant species remain in check on the perimeter of the preserve and plan to plant some native trees, plants and shrubs at the main entrance at Vets Field. If you enjoy the preserve and would like to help out with some of the trail work and conservation projects, please consider volunteering some of your time to become “A Friend of the Trails”.

A notification by email will be sent out whenever help is needed on a project in the preserve. To let us know you would like to help, either e-mail us at info@oswhills.org or call Greg Decker 860-739-9177. A signup sheet is also located on the new display panel on the back side of the kiosk at Vets field.

Seen Around the Preserve



The bloom of the Eastern Skunk Cabbage



A Red Eft, the terrestrial juvenile stage of the Red-spotted Newt



The handiwork of one of the resident beavers